

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AF-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
ICA-11 IO-13 /091 W
-----044496 250033Z /66
P 242151Z APR 78
FM USINT HAVANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1708

C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 1056

DEPT PLEASE PASS HORN OF AFRICA COLLECTIVE

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV MILI ET SO CU
SUBJ: MENGISTU VISIT TO CUBA

REF: HAVANA 1037

1. SUMMARY: MENGISTU ENTHUSIASTICALLY RECEIVED IN CUBA.
HE THREATENS MILITARY SETTLEMENT IN ERITREA BUT CASTRO
AVOIDS PUBLIC COMMENT ON THIS SO FAR. END SUMMARY

2. MENGISTU WAS RECEIVED IN CUBA, APRIL 21, BY THOUSANDS
OF CUBANS MOBILIZED BY GOVERNMENT TO LINE FIFTEEN MILE
ROUTE BETWEEN AIRPORT AND PROTOCOL HOUSE. DESPITE SPORADIC
RAIN AND 3-HOUR DELAY IN MENGISTU'S ARRIVAL FROM LUANDA
(WHERE HE REPORTEDLY CONFERRED WITH NETO JUST BACK FROM
MOSCOW), CROWD HELD ITS PLACES--IN SOME CASES FOR UP TO
SEVEN HOURS--AND GREETED MENGISTU AND CASTRO IN APPARENTLY
JUBILANT SPIRITS. (COMMENT: USINT OFFICER MINGLED WITH
CROWD IN SEVERAL LOCATIONS. MOST WERE HAPPY TO HAVE BEEN
RELEASED FROM WORK AND TO HAVE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK TO
THEIR NEIGHBORS. ALTHOUGH CASTRO AND ETHIOPIAN LEADER
TRAVLED IN OPEN CAR AND CROWD WAS ALLOWED TO GET CLOSE,
SOLDIERS OCCUPIED BUILDINGS ALONG PARADE ROUTE AND
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MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TROOPS WERE HELD IN READINESS
IN BACK STREETS IN EVENT OF TROUBLE. AS FAR AS WE
COULD SEE, HOWEVER, CROWDS WERE ORDERLY AND APPROPRIATELY
ENTHUSIASTIC.)

3. MENGISTU DELEGATION (SEE REFTTEL), APRIL 22, BEGAN TALKS WITH
CUBAN DELEGATION HEADED BY FIDEL AND RAUL CASTRO.

MILITARY COMPONENT APPARENTLY FIGURES HEAVILY IN TALKS, GIVEN REPORTED PARTICIPATION OF CUBAN CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL SENEN CASAS, COMMANDER IN ETHIOPIA GNERAL ARNALDO OCHOA, AND EX-ANGOLAN FORCES CHIEF GNERAL ABELARDO COLONE. OTHER CUBAN DELEGATION MEMBERS INCLUDE OLD-TIME COMMUNIST POLITBURO MEMBERS CARLOS RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ, BLAS ROCA, AND ARNALDO MILIAN (WHO AT LEAST SYMBOLICALLY REPRESENT MOSCOW LINE), PLUS PLITBURO MEMBERS RAMIRO VALDES, GUILLERMO GARCIA, OSVALDO DORTICOS, ARMANDO HART, PEDRO MIRET, AND MINISTER OF INTERIO SERGIO DEL VALLE. (DEL VALLE, APRIL 12, RETURNED TO CUBA ON FLIGHT FROM HUNGARY. HIS WHEREABOUTS DURING EARLIER PART OF MONTH ARE NOT KNOWN TO US.) OTHER CUBAN DELEGATION MEMBERS INCLUDE CP SECRETARIAT MEMBERS RAUL VALDES VIVO (CHARGED WITH FRATERNAL PARTY TIES) AND ANTONIO PEREZ HERRERO AND CHIEF OF GENERAL FOREIGN RELATIONS DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNIST PARTY LIONEL SOTO.

4. MENGISTU ON APRIL 22 WAS AWARED PLAYA GIRON (BAY OF PIGS) MEDAL. IN HIS REMARKS, HE TOOK VERBAL JAB AT US IN CONNECTION WITH BAY OF PIGS, BUT DREW NO CONTEMPORARY LINK BETWEEN US AND HORN CRISIS. MOST INTERESTING, HOWEVER, WAS MENGISTU'S STATEMENT THAT ETHIOPIA HAS STILL NOT DEFEATED ERITREAN REBELS WHO NOW ARE "GUIDED, COORDINATED, AND SUPPORTED" BY IMPERIALISM AND ARAB REACTIONARIES. MENGISTU SAID THAT REPEATED ETHIOPIAN PROPOSALS, WHICH STILL STAND, FOR
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PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO ERITREAN PROBLEM HAVE BEEN IGNORED. THUS, ONLY SOLUTION IS TO "RAISE ARMS IN ONE HAND, AND, AT THE SAME TIME, EXTEND OTHER HAND AS SIGNAL OF PEACE". MENGISTU THEN ADDED THAT HE HAS "ABSOLUTE CONFIDENCE" THAT CUBANS AND OTHER "PROGRESSIVE FORCES" WILL BE ENTIRELY ON ETHIOPIAN SIDE ON THIS MATTER. CASTRO, READING FROM PREPARED TEXT, MADE NO MENTION OF ERITREA AND DID NOT RESPOND DIRECTLY TO MENGISTU'S REMARKS. (COMMENT: CUBANS CONTINUE TO REITERATE TO US AND ARAB DIPLOMATS HERE THAT CUBANS "WILL NOT BE PARTY" TO INVASION OF ERITREA.)

5. MENGISTU, APRIL 24, DEPARTS FOR SANTIAGO DE CUBA AND IS EXPECTED TO VISIT OTHER INTERIOR LOCATIONS SUCH AS CAMAGUEY AND ISLE OF PINES. IT IS EXPECTED THAT HE AND CASTRO WILL GIVE MAJOR PUBLIC SPPECH, EITHER IN ONE OF THESE LOCATIONS OR LATER IN HAVANA. (WHILE IN HAVANA, APRIL 22-23, OTHER MEMBERS OF MENGISTU DELEGATION WERE RECEIVED SEPARATELY BY CUBAN NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL COMMUNIST PARTY AND MASS ORGANIZATION OFFICIALS IN THEIR RESPECTIVE FIELDS OF INTEREST.)

6. COMMENT: AS EXPECTED, MENGISTU'S VISIT IS RECEIVING

EXTRAORDINARILY FULSOME PROPAGANDA TREATMENT BY CUBANS. CASTRO'S DESIRE TO PRESERVE WARM GLOW OF VICTORY AND FRATERNAL SOLIDARITY, OF COURSE, LIMITS THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE CUBAN LEADER CAN DEFLECT MENGISTU'S OBVIOUSLY STRONG-FELT URGE TO BRING ERITREANS TO HEEL. THEREFORE, WHILE IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT CUBANS WISH TO DO THEIR UTMOST TO CRAFT POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, AND TO AVOID LARGE-SCALE COMBAT INVOLVEMENT IN ERITREA, WE JUDGE IT UNLIKELY, PENDING A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, THAT CASTRO WILL WANT TO MAKE MILITARY TASK HARDER FOR MENGISTU IN ERITREA BY DRAWING DOWN CUBAN TROOPS IN OGADEN WHO PROTECT ADDIS FLANK. INDEED, MAINTAINING CUBAN TROOPS IN OGADEN MAY BE MINIMUM GESTURE CASTRO CAN OFFER IN ORDER TO AVOID ERITREAN INVOLVEMENT.

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7. REGARDING POSSIBILITY FOR POLITICAL TALKS ON ERITREAN PROBLEM HERE DURING MENGISTU VISIT, NONE OF LOCAL DIPLOMATIC SOURCES HAVE YET BEEN ABLE TO CONFIRM PRESENCE OF EPLF DELEGATION. (ITALIAN AMBASSADOR, INCIDENTALLY, TOLD USINT CHIEF THAT CUBAN AMBASSADOR IN DAMASCUS IS SOURCE OF REPORT THAT EPLF WOULD BE COMING HERE.) GEORGE HABBASH HELD MEETING WITH FIDEL CASTRO, APRIL 21, AND PRESS STATEMENT WAS ISSUED, APRIL 24, WHICH GAVE IMPRESSION THAT HE HAS LEFT CUBA. ARAB DIPLOMATIC SOURCES HERE, HOWEVER, INDICATE THAT HABBASH REMAINS IN CUBA, TRAVELING IN INTERIOR. END COMMENT.
LANE

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED HORN OF AFRICA COLLECTIVE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LOBBYING, MILITARY ASSISTANCE, POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, VISITS, HEAD OF GOVERNMENT VISITS, ERITREA, GOVERNMENT REACTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978HAVANA01056
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780175-0630
Format: TEL
From: HAVANA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780425/aaaaausv.tel
Line Count: 150
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 61d4c9a8-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 HAVANA 1037
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 14 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2873194
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MENGISTU VISIT TO CUBA
TAGS: PDEV, MILI, OVIP, ET, SO, CU, (MENGISTU HAILE MARIAM)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/61d4c9a8-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014